Obſervations on the Burning of the Steeple of St. Paul's *Cathedral,* London. *By the Rev.* S. Denne. *In a Letter to Mr.* Gough.

Read at the Society of Antiquaries May 17, 1792.

Dear Sir,

In your Britiſh Topography, vol. I. p. 607, you have mentioned a tract relative to the burning of St. Paul's ſteeple, June 4, 1561, printed by Seres in 1563 [*a*]. By the title page it ſhould ſeem to be an addition to a former tract publiſhed by Seres; and in a volume of black-letter tracts, 12mo, which my friend Mr. Latham not long ſince picked up, there is, as I apprehend, the book alluded to. Imagining from your ſilence that you may not have ſeen it, and it being very ſhort, I have tranſmitted a copy of it. Mr. Herbert, the Continuator of Typographical Antiquities, to whom the tract has been ſhewn, had never met with it; but he is inclined to think that all the material circumſtances have been inſerted in our chronicles. Whether he is right in his conjecture, no perſon is more competent to determine than yourſelf. As far as I can recollect there are incidents of which I was not before apprized.

According to Stowe, in his Survey, the ſteeple was ſet on fire between three and four o'clock; but it appears, from a

[*a*] This book is mentioned by Mr. Herbert, p. 696.

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relation of the fire upon oath, entered in the Regiſtry of Biſhop Grindal (Newcourt, Repert. vol I. p.3.), that the accident befell the ſteeple between the hours of one and two. The fact moſt probably was, that the flaſh of lightning was between one and two, though, as obſerved in Seres' firſt tract, the ſmoke from the ſteeple was not perceived till ſome time after.

Notwithſtanding the confeſſion of the ſexton that this calamity was not occaſioned by lightning, I ſee no reaſon to doubt of that being the ſole cauſe of it, though circumſtances might, for an hour or two, retard the appearance of the fire. *Quære*, Does the damage done to the turret of the ſteeple of St. Martin's church occur in any hiſtory of London? It is in a brief Chronicle, printed by T. Marſh, 1561 [*b*]. The advice of the experienced in warres to ſhoot down with canons the ſteeple of St. Paul's, to prevent the ſpreading of the fire, would have reflected credit on an Engineer of the iſland of Laputa. The paſſage from Jeremiah printed in the title page was, it may be preſumed, the text to biſhop Pilkington's ſermon, the ſubſtance of which ſo ſpeedily iſſued from the preſs of Maſter Seres.

I am, Dear Sir,

Your faithful

And obliged ſervant,

Wilmington, March 8, 1792. S. DENNE.

[*b*] Herbert, p. 851.

The

The true Report of the burnyng of the Steple, and Churche of Poules, in London.

Jeremy, xviii.

I wyll ſpeake ſuddenlye agaynſt a nation, or agaynſt a kyngedome, to plucke it up; and to roote it out, and deſtroye it. But yf that nation, agaynſte whome I have pronounced, turne from their wickedneſs, I wyll repent of the plage that I thought to brynge uppon them.

Imprynted at London at the Weſte ende of Paules Church at the Sygne of the Hedghogge, by Wylliam Seres.
Cum privilegio ad imprimendum ſolum.
Anno 1561. The x of June.

Leaf A. ii.

The true reporte of the burning of the Steple and church of Paules, in London.

On Wedneſday beinge the fourthe daye of June, in the yeare of our Lord 1561, and in the thyrde yeare of the reigne of our Soveraygne Ladye Elizabeth, by the grace of God, Queene of Englande, Fraunce, and Ireland, defender of the faith, &c. betweene one and two of the clocke at afternoone, was ſcene a marveilous great fyrie lightning, and immediately inſued a moſt terrible hydeous cracke of thunder, ſuch as ſeldom hath been heard, and that by eſtimacion of ſenſe, directlye over the citie of London. At which inſtance the corner of a turret of y^e^ ſteple of Saint Martin's churche within Ludgate was torne, and divers great ſtones caſten downe, and a hole broken throughe the roofe and timber of the ſaid church by the fall of the ſame ſtones.

For divers perſones in tyme of the ſaide tempeſt being on the river of Thamys, and others, beyng in the fieldes, nere adjoyning to ye citie, affirmed, that thei ſaw a long and a ſpeare pointed flame of fier (as it were) runne through the toppe of the broche or ſhaft of Paules ſteple from the eaſte weſtwarde. And ſome of the pariſh of St. Martin's then being in the ſtreate dyd feele a marveylous ſtrong ayre or whorlewynd, with a ſmel lyke brimſtone coming from Paules church, and withal heard the ruſh of y^e^ ſtones which fell
(A. iij) frō their ſteeple into the churche. Betwene iiij and five of the clocke a ſmoke was eſpied, by divers, to breake oute under the bowle of the ſaid ſhaft of Paules, and namely, by Peter Johnſon, principall Regiſtrer to the Biſhop of Londō, who immediately brought word to the Biſhop's houſe. But ſodeinly after, as it were in a momente, the flame brake forth

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in a circle like a garlande rounde about the broche, about two yards to theſtimacion of ſight under the bowle of the ſaid ſhaft, and increaſed in ſuche wiſe, that within a quarter of an howre, or litle more, the croſſe and the egle on the toppe fell downe upon the South croſſe Ile. The Lord Maior being ſent for, and his brethren came with all ſpede poſſible, and had a ſhort conſultation, as in ſuch a caſe might be, with ye Biſhop of London, and others, for ye beſt way of remedy. And thither came alſo ye Lord Keper of the great ſeale, and the Lord Treaſorer, who by their wiſedom and authoritie dyrected as good order, as in ſo great a confuſiō could poſſibly be.

Some there wer, pretēding experience in warres, that coūceled the remanente of the ſteple to be ſhot down with canons, which counſel was not liked, as moſt perilous both for the diſperſing the fire, and deſtructiō of houſes and people; other perceiving the ſteple to be paſt all recovery, conſidering the hugeneſs of the fier, and the dropping of the leade, thought beſte to geat ladders and ſcale the churche, and with axes to hew down a ſpace of the roofe of the churche to ſtay the fier, at leaſt to ſave ſome part of the ſaide churche, which was concluded. But before the lad-(A. iiij) ders and buckets could be brought, and things put in any order, and eſpecially becauſe the churche was of ſuch height, that thei could not ſcale it, and no ſufficiente number of axes could be had, ye laborers alſo being troubled with ye multitude of ydle gazers, the moſte parte of the higheſte roofe of the churche was on fier.

Fyrſt, the fall of the croſſe and egle fired the Southe croſſe Ile, which Ile was firſt conſumed, the beames and brands of the ſteeple fell downe on every ſide, and fired the other thre partes, that is to ſaye, the Chauncel or Quier, the North Ile, and the body of the churche, ſo that in one howres ſpace

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ye broch of the ſteple was brent downe to ye battlementes, and the moſt part of ye higheſt roofe of the churche likewiſe conſumed. The ſtate of the ſteple and churche ſeming both deſperate, my Lord Mayor was adviſed by one maiſter Winter, of ye admiraltie, to converte the moſt part of his care and proviſiō to preſerve the Biſhops palace adjoynyng to the North-weſt end of the church: leaſt frō that houſe beinge ſarge, the fier might ſprede to the ſtretes adjoyning, whereupon the ladders, buckets, and laborers, were commanded thither, and by greate labor and diligence, a piece of the roofe of the Northe Ile was cut down, and the fier ſo ſtayed, and by muche water, that parte quenched, and the ſaid Biſhops houſe preſerved. It pleaſed God alſo at the ſame tyme bothe to turne and calme the winde, which afore was vehemēt, and continued ſtil high and greate in other partes without the citie. There wer above V. C. perſons y^t laboured in carying and filling water, and divers ſubſtancial citizens toke paynes as if thei had bene laborers, ſo did alſo divers and ſondrye gentlemen, whoſe names wer not knowen to the writer hereof, but amongſt other, the ſaid M. Winter, and one Mr. Stranguiſh did both take notable paines in their own perſons, and alſo much directed and encouraged other, and that not without great daūger to thēſelves. In ye evening came the Lord Clinton, Lord Admiral, from the court at Grenewiche, whē the Queenes majeſty, aſſone as the rage of the fier was eſpied by her majeſtye and others in the court, of the pitifull inclination and love that her gracious highneſſe dyd beare both to y^e ſaid church, and the citie, ſent to aſſyſt my Lorde Mayor for the ſuppreſſyng of the fyre, who with his wiſdome, authority, and diligent travayl, did very much good therin. About x of the clocke the fyercenes of the fyre was paſt, the tymbre being fallen, and lyinge brenninge uppon

uppon the vaultes of ſtone, the vaultes yet (God be thanked) ſtandynge unperiſhed: ſo as onelye the tymbre of the hole church was conſumed, and the lead molten, ſavying the moſt part of the two lowe Iles of the Queare, and a piece of the North Ile, and an other ſmal piece of ye Southe, in the bodye of the churche. Notwithſtandyng all which, it pleaſed the merciful God in his wrath to remẽbre his mercie, and to encloſe the harme of this moſt fyerce and terrible fyre wythin the walles of thys one church, not extending any part of his wrath in this fyre uppon the reſt of the citie, which to all reaſon and ſence of man was ſubject to utter diſtruction. For in the hole city without the churche no ſtycke was kyndled ſurelye, notwithſtanding that in diverſe partes and ſtretes, and within the houſes bothe adjoyning, and of a good diſtaunce, as in Fleteſtrete and Newgate market, by the violence of fyre, burninge coles of greate bigneſſe fell downe almooſt as thicke as haylſtones, and flawes of lead were blowen abrode into the gardins without ye citie, like flawes of ſnowe in bredthe, w'oute hurt, God be thanked, to any houſe or perſõ. Many fond talkes goe abrode of the original cauſe of this fier. Some ſay it was negligence of plumbers, whereas by due examination, it is proved that no plumbers or other workemen laboured in the churche for ſixe monethes before. Others ſuſpect it was done by ſome wicked practiſe of wildfyer or gunpowder, but no juſt ſuſpicions therof by any examinacion can be founde hitherto. Some ſuſpect conjurers and ſorcerers, wherof there is alſo no great likelyhode. And if it hadde bene wrought y^t^ waie, yet could not the devil have done it, without God's permiſſiõ, and to ſome purpoſe of his unſercheable judgemẽts, as appereth in the ſtory of Job. The true cauſe, as it ſemeth, was the tẽpeſt by God's ſuffrance: for it cannot be otherwiſe gathered, but that at y^e^ ſaid great

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and terrible thunderclap, when St. Martins ſteple was torne, the lightning, which by natural order ſmiteth ye higheſt, did firſt ſmite ye top of Paules ſteple, and entring in at the ſmall holes, which have always remained open for building ſkaffoldes to the workes, and finding the timbers very olde and drie, did kindle the ſame, and ſo the fier increaſing grew to a flame, and wrought ye effecte which folowed, moſt terrible then to behold and now moſt lamentable to looke on.

On Sonday folowing, beynge the viii day of June, the reverend in God, the Biſhop of Dureſme, at Paules croſſe, made a learned and fruitful ſermon, exhorting the auditory to a general repentance, and namely to humble obedięce of the lawes and ſuperior powers, which vertue is much decayed in theſe our daies. Seming to have intellygēce from the Queenes highnes, that her Majeſtie intendeth that more ſeveritie of lawes ſhall be executed againſt perſons diſobedyent, as well in cauſes of religion as civil, to the great rejoyſing of his auditours. He exhorted alſo hys audięce to take this as a generall warninge to the whole realme, and namelye to the citie of London, of ſome greater plage to folow, if amendmente of lyfe in all ſtates did not enſue: He muche reproved thoſe perſons whiche woulde aſſigne the cauſe of this wrathe of God to any perticular ſtate of mē, or that were diligent to loke into other mens lyves, and could ſee no faultes in themſelfes; but wiſhed that every man wold deſcend into himſelfe, and ſay with David, *Ego ſum qui peccavi.* I am he that hathe ſinned, and ſo furth, to that effect very godlye. He alſo not onely reproved the prophanatyon of the ſaid churche of Paules, of long time heretofore abuſed by walking, jangling, brawling, fighting, bargaining, &c. namely, in ſermons and ſervice time: but alſo aūſwered by the way to the objections of ſuch evil-tunged perſōs, which do impute this token

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of God's deſerved ire, to alteratiō or rather reformatiō of religiō, declaring out of aūcient records and hiſtories, ye like, yea and greater matters, had befallen in the time of ſuperſtiō and ignorance. For in the firſt year of King Stephē, not only the ſaid churche of Paules was brent, but alſo a great part of the city, that is to ſay frō Londō Bridge unto St. Clemēts without Tēple bar, was by fier cōſumed. And in ye daies of King Hēry ye VI. ye Steple of Paules was alſo fired by lightning, although it was then ſtaide by diligēce of ye citizens, ye fier being thē by likelyhode not ſo fierce. Many other ſuche like cōmon calamities he reherſed, whiche had happened in other coūtreis, both nigh to this realm, and far of, where the church of Rome hath moſt authority, and therefore concluded the fureſt way to be, y^t^ every man ſhould judge, examin, and amēd himſelfe, and embrace, beleve, and truely folow ye word of God, and earneſtly to pray to God to turn away frō us his deſerved wrath and indignation, whereof this his terrible work is a moſt certein warning, if we repent not unfeinedly. The whiche God grāt maye come to paſſe in all eſtates and degrees, to ye glory of his name, and to our endeleſſe comforte, in Chriſt our Saviour. Amen.

God Save the Queene.